

Some people are speeding on my road. Will the county reduce the speed limit? What else can you do to help?

Good questions! People are rushing—to work and home again, to take their kids to school and to practice, to meet friends, and to get away on vacation. Wherever you turn, people are hurrying to get somewhere. And some people speed to get there.

Law-abiding drivers, pedestrians, cyclists, and residents along the roads often feel at risk. They ask the county reduce the speed limit. Can we reduce the posted speed limit? *Probably*. Will this make people slow down? *Probably not*.

Most drivers are good drivers. They seldom have accidents or get traffic tickets. Drivers usually drive at comfortably safe speeds so they do not endanger themselves or others. A study by the Washington State Traffic Safety Commission a few years ago showed that 16% of the people get ALL of the tickets!

Unless we see an unusual number of accidents on a road, we know that most motorists are driving safely. Some may disagree. However, the agreement of thousands of motorists suggests it is safe and reasonable. Only the few drivers who exceed that speed need to be controlled. For this reason, state law says that we should set speed limits mostly by the speed of the majority, 85%, of drivers.

Other ways to slow traffic down can be successful if used properly.

Regular law enforcement is the most effective way to slow people down, but law enforcement is usually not funded to patrol every road as much as they might like.

In urban residential areas, traffic-calming designs may help. Half-street closures, forced turns onto longer routes, speed humps, chicanes, and special paint markings might work, but are generally not appropriate for rural “through-roads”. Different designs may help on those roads, but that usually means expensive construction.

Neighborhood watch groups using speed trailers (showing the posted speed limit and the motorist’s speed) can effectively slow unintentional speeders.

We often get requests to slow traffic to help pedestrians and bicyclists. For these, if funds are available, we may be able to improve the road by removing blind spots, widening the shoulder for them, or adding a separate walkway to keep pedestrians away from the traffic.

The County Engineer can’t know every speeding problem on the thousands of miles of county roads. If you have concerns about speeds on a county road, call the County Road Department or the Sheriff’s Department. They might not know about the problem. Note the time of day that speeding is a common problem, it may help with enforcement.

Don McInnes, P.E., Clallam County Engineer

Questions about this article, or any of the series, or on other topics related to County Roads, may be directed either to your County Engineer, or to Al King, P.E., County Road Administration Board, Olympia, at Al@CRAB.Wa.Gov.